

Dear Lake County Residents:

To many Midwesterners, February is just another chilly month to endure until spring. But there is another side to February -- it is American Heart Month. I see it as an ideal time to focus on one's health, especially heart health. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in this country; one in every three deaths is from heart disease and stroke. But the right choices can significantly reduce your risk of illness. Here are some tips to stay in good health not only in February but throughout the year:

- Eat a healthy diet. Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. If you need a quick snack during the day, keep a serving or two of your favorite fruit or vegetables handy wherever you are. Try to avoid saturated fats and cholesterol.
- Increase physical activity. Be physically active for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- Avoid tobacco use.
- Find out if you have high blood pressure or cholesterol. If you do, get effective treatment.
- Limit your intake of alcohol and caffeine.
- Visit your healthcare provider for a regular medical checkup.
- Know the signs and symptoms of a heart attack. Common symptoms are:
 - Unusually heavy pressure on the chest, like there's a ton of weight on you
 - Sharp upper body pain in the neck, back and jaw
 - Severe shortness of breath
 - Cold sweats (not hot flashes from menopause)
 - Unusual or unexplained fatigue
 - Unfamiliar dizziness or light-headedness
 - Unexplained nausea or vomiting

Heart disease and stroke affect all of our lives, but we can all play a role in ending it. Prevention starts with everyone. Following the suggestions above is a good start.

Sincerely,

Irene Pierce
Executive Director
Lake County Health Department/
Community Health Center